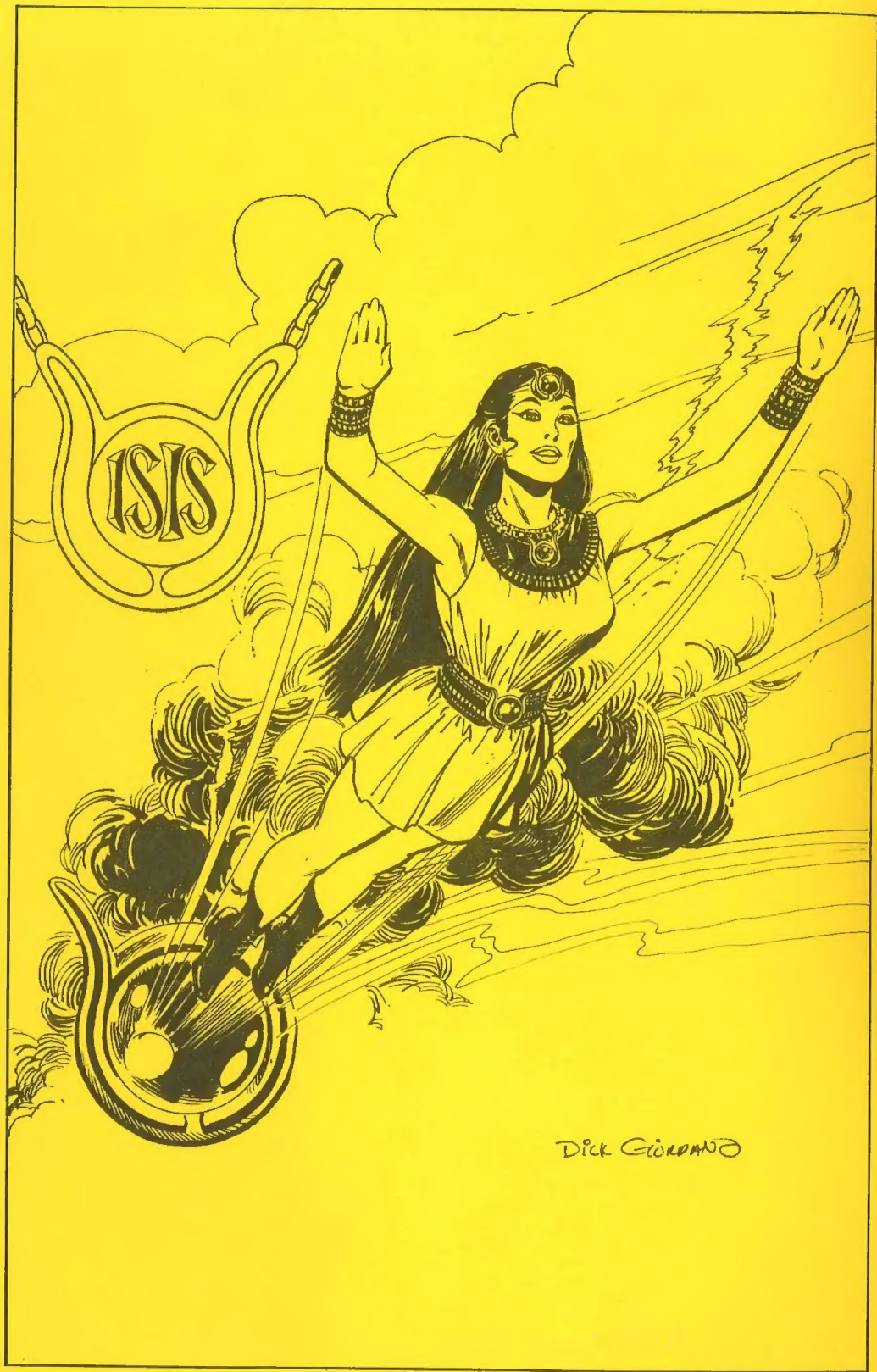


No. 17

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THE HEROINES SHOWCASE







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MISS FURY



WOMEN WHO DREW HEROINES (MILLS, RENEE & HOPPER)

by
TRINA ROBBINS



Attempting to add up the number of women cartoonists of the thirties and forties, I come up with the grand total of 16. I may have missed an esoteric few, but my list *does* include such never-heard-of-befores as Ruth Carroll (The Pussycat Princess), Grace Drayton, (Dolly Dimples), Virginia Clarke (Oh Diana), Virginia Krausman (Annabelle), and Neysa McMein (Deathless Deer). It's interesting to note that with the exception of Odin, who drew a boy strip (Dickie Dare) and Edwina, who drew a boy and his dog (Tippy) all the others were girl/woman strips. It's also interesting to note that of the 16 cartoonists, only three, Lily Renee, Fran Hopper and Tarpe Mills, drew for comic books.

Lily Renee and Fran Hopper worked for Fiction House, a company noted for hiring the then unhirables. Fiction House's star cartoonist, Matt Baker, was black. They also had women writers; Ruth Roche, who wrote "Sheena," and Toni Blum, daughter of Alex Blum, a prolific Fiction House artist.

I first find Lily Renee, described by Fiction House co-founder (along with Will Eisner) Jerry Iger, as "a beautiful lady" in *Rangers Comics*, where she drew "Werewolf Hunter" from 1944 through 1947. "Werewolf Hunter" was a decoratively drawn story of the supernatural that always featured some mystic or inhuman female character. As with Fran Hopper, female characters were Renee's strong point. Her weak point, which she also shares with Hopper and countless other female artists (including yours truly) was her ability to draw men. For this reason, although she was given the lead story for *Planet Comics*, "The Lost World," from 1944 through 1946, it is not her best work. "The Lost World" starred Hunt Bowman as the man who leads the ragtag survivors of the destruction of civilization-as-we-know-it against their conquerors, the Voltamen, green Nazis from the planet Volta, whose most outstanding distinction is that they speak backwards. ("We the Voltamen are. We backwards speak.") While Lily Renee did a great job on Lyssa, Hunt's blonde companion, her rendering of Hunt and the Voltans tends to be weak and unconvincing.

Her best work for Fiction House was Senorita Rio, the beautiful Brazilian actress turned spy who shared *Fight Comics* with Tiger Girl from 1945 through 1947. I have a 1946 *Fight* with a spectacular Lily Renee/Senorita Rio cover. In a 1947 *Rangers*, she successfully attempts a broad cartoon style with a funny, pinuppy one pager called "Tess Taxi." Renee disappears from the pages of Fiction House after 1947, but I have a 1948 *Abbott and Costello* comic book drawn and signed by her and featuring Rosita, a Latin



SENORITA RIO
(after Lily Renee)



MYSTA OF THE MOON
(after Fran Hopper)

book form through 1949. Mills, who really did resemble her protagonist Marla Drake, went to Erasmus High School and Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. In a letter to fan Donald Goldsamt, dated 1942, she wrote, "At the age of ten I used to painstakingly print a two-page weekly newspaper with the aid of my brother . . . I took care of the society and gossip column, a serial story and of course — a comic strip which, at the time, I thought was great stuff because of the laughter from the family." Before becoming a cartoonist Mills was a fashion model, a fact which helps explain the remarkable high-fashion quality of her work. Her comic books always featured one or two pages of paper dolls. In another 1942 letter to Donald Goldsamt, she writes about "the number of requests for special drawings, pinup girls, cutout dolls, fashions, etc."

Mills is also the exception to my earlier observation that women cartoonists seem to have trouble drawing men. Her male characters are as convincing as her women. Some, such as the bald one-armed German General Bruno, and Albino Jo, the college-educated albino Brazilian indian, are all-time greats.

lovely who is none but Senorita Rio under a different name.

Jerry Iger couldn't remember Fran Hopper so we may never know what she looked like. She first shows up in my Fiction House collection in a 1943 *Planet Comics* under the name of Fran Deitrick, illustrating "Norge Benson." This title was later taken over by a mysterious genius who signed himself Al Walker, and compared to his brilliant renderings, Fran Deitrick/Hopper's work is hopelessly scratchy. However, by 1947 she was doing a magnificent Camilla in the back of *Jungle Comics*.

Sometime between 1943 and 1944 Fran Deitrick apparently married Mr. Hopper. Looking through my *Planet Comics* I find that as Fran Hopper, she drew "Gale Allen and Her All Girl Squadron" in 1945, and "Mysta of the Moon" in 1946. The Fiction House character she stayed with the longest was Jane Martin, of *Wings Comics*. Jane Martin started out in 1941 as an Army nurse, became an aviatrix during the War, and in peacetime went to work for a private plane company, chasing crooks in airborne adventures. I have a coverless (and therefore dateless) *Wings Comics* from the war years, possibly 1944, with a Jane Martin story drawn by Lily Renee. However, from 1945 through 1947 Jane Martin was drawn by Fran Hopper.

Both of these women seem to disappear from Fiction House after 1947, just after they were attaining professional excellence. Aside from Lily Renee's brief reappearance in *Abbot and Costello* in 1948, I can find no further examples of their work.

Tarpe Mills is a totally different case. She was her own mistress and created her own syndicated heroine whom she reprinted from the Sunday pages into comic books. Miss Fury started in 1940 and ran in newspaper and comic

The two main female characters in the nine-year epic of *Miss Fury* are Marla Drake and the Baroness Erika Von Kampf. The story starts out with Marla Drake, socialite, ripping off her fancy dress ball costume in a fit of pique after learning that "Carol is wearing the *same* thing . . ." Her French maid suggests wearing the black leopard skin her uncle left her. It had been used by an African witch doctor as a ceremonial robe. Marla puts it on and her adventures begin — first as Black Fury, and later changed to Miss Fury. She soon learns that the skin gives its wearer "strange powers" (never clearly described) but that it also carries a curse. Perhaps this is why nine years worth of mishaps befall Marla after donning the costume.



At any rate, even though she rarely wore the skin after 1942, the Baroness Erika Von Kampf, an adventuress with her bangs cut in a curious "V" shape to conceal the swastika branded on her forehead, steals Marla's fiance, Gary Hale. They are married, and although the marriage is later annulled, Erika bears Gary's child, giving it over entirely to the care of Diman Saraf, a mad scientist who intends to use it for grisly experiments. The little boy is rescued by none other than Marla herself (making a rare appearance as Miss Fury in her leopard skin). Marla, not knowing who his parents

are, adopts him. Between losing her fiance and adopting his son, she has been prisoner of a Nazi battalion under the command of General Bruno in an underground encampment in Brazil and fought with a group of Brazilian guerillas under the leadership of Era, a Senorita Rio-esque Brazilian bombshell. In 1946 Marla, who is about to inherit two million dollars, is kidnapped and replaced by a double, Belle Terril. Belle fools everyone except Marla's adopted son and her white Persian cat, Perri-Purr. (Incidentally, Perri-Purr was based on Tarpe Mills' own cat.)



None of the major characters in *Miss Fury* are ever killed off; they return again in later episodes. General Bruno is blown up twice; once when a bomb he had taped to Perri-Purr is thrown back at him, and again when his Brazilian underground headquarters are dynamited by Erika Von Kampf, with whom he has a love-hate relationship. Nevertheless he reappears quite alive in 1947. Era, the queen of the Brazilian Underground, comes back with a night club act in late '46, and leads



Marla into an episode involving two handsome men who have mastered the secret of eternal life and are really over a century old. Erika herself, whose swastika scar becomes visible when she tells a lie, disappears into a car in 1945, yanked by Wolfram Von Prussia, an old lover whom she had left for dead six months before. Although my run of *Miss Furies* stops in 1947, it's a safe bet that Erika reappeared some time in the next two years.

Mills' last known published comic is a love story she did for Marvel Comics in 1971. Because
(continued on page 32)

IN THE DARK

by Deby Dunn

Darkstar is a superheroine about whom very little is known. The same can be said of many superheroes, it is true, but Darkstar is even more mysterious than most. We don't even know her full name. She is Russian, and faithful to her mother country, even though she spent much time with the Champions in Los Angeles. Her power, the "darkforce," can do just about anything. And that's all we know of her.

But let's start at the beginning. Her first name, or at least the name everyone calls her by, is Laynia, and her power is control of a weird dark-energy field which she calls the darkforce. This darkforce is capable of doing just about anything. So far she has used it to fly, blast, crush, squeeze the breath out of a person (the Angel), block a road, create a wall or screen of shadow, teleport, open interdimensional portals, and disrupt the internal systems of a Sentinel. Apparently the darkforce has something to do with telepathy, for she uses it to teleport herself, the Crimson Dynamo, and the Titanium Man in *Champions* #10. Later that same issue she makes a sort of interspatial television set/view screen so the Crimson Dynamo can gloat from a safe distance. She also uses the darkforce to free (by teleportation) the Champions when the Dynamo goes berserk, and guides them to the scene of the battle telepathically. Later when the Champions faced Swarm, the Aggregate Man, Swarm zapped Darkstar telepathically through the darkforce. She also frequently created a sphere of her dark energy to transport herself, and sometimes the Champions too. Whether she could see through the darksphere and guide it, or it just sensed where she wanted to go and went there, is unclear.

Besides leaving her vulnerable to telepathic attack, there were other disadvantages to the darkforce. It didn't confuse people who could see in the dark (the Stranger, *Champions* #12), nor did it stop shadow-beings (Warlord Kaa, *Champions* #11). These are both logical exceptions. The darkforce is also vulnerable to disruption. In *Iron Man* #109, Iron Man uses his armor's power to do this and Darkstar is rendered unconscious. Apparently the darkforce is as much a part of Darkstar as an arm or a leg, and when it is injured she feels pain.

Darkstar's credibility as a character was generally outstanding, though there were a few instances of the time-honored "feminine weaknesses." In *Champions* #10 she spends the first few pages of the book putting forth that old wail, "I don't know how long I can hold them!" When one of the Champions strikes her wall of





dark energy Darkstar all but faints. However she manages to teleport herself and her partners out of the steel cubicle where she has imprisoned the Champions, and later she comes back into action with what became established as her usual efficient manner. For the next five issues or so her combat record was excellent. Then in *Champions* #17, the last issue of that book, she exhibited glaring inconsistencies. After instilling a Sentinel with a semblance of life and so defeating the Evil Mutants and saving the lives of the Champions, she stops the Vanisher halfway in a teleport. This, it is clear from the Vanisher's stunned (literally) reaction, has never been done before. Despite having tossed a bunch of Sentinels around like rag dolls and stopping the Vanisher's teleport, neither of these being a mean feat, Darkstar crawls into the Iceman's arms, whimpering, "Oh, hold me!" I find it hard to believe this is the same woman who saved the world in *Champions* #13 and who, mere minutes

before fighting the Sentinels, had declaimed to an anti-mutant mob, "Darkstar does not take kindly to being threatened!" Especially since she had never even looked at Iceman before.

On the other hand, Darkstar's record is better than that of lots of other, more established, superheroines. In the introductory issues, where she was working with a group of Russian spies, Darkstar obeyed direct orders but otherwise did what she thought was right, as when she freed the Champions because she knew the Crimson Dynamo was wrong. As she told the Griffin in *Champions* #8, "... Yri only commands my obedience, Griffin, not my conscience. That alone has been left to Darkstar, may heaven help me!" Later, when the Titanium Man has scolded her for being too compassionate a jailer to the Black Widow, she rebukes, "That is for Yuri to say, Titanium Man!"

In battle beside the Champions, Darkstar usually held her own and more. It seemed she was always finding new ways to use the darkforce, and there were, and are, few other heroes who use their powers too innovatively. During battle Darkstar often saw facets of a situation that the others overlooked, and acted on her knowledge, quickly and effectively. For instance, she was the first to realize Swarm (*Champions* #15) wasn't human at all.

Of course, her swift actions weren't always for the best. More than once she reacted without telling the others what she was doing; they would assume she was in trouble and eventually battles might be lost. Naturally, it was almost always Iceman who let his guard down on account of Darkstar. I don't think she ever encouraged him, but Iceman never could take a hint.

There were, of course, exceptions to the rule of Darkstar's effectiveness in battle. In *Champions* #16 she did absolutely nothing to fight Magneto, except transport the Champions to where the action was in one of her darkspheres. She then blacked out. And, in *Champions* #15, she was captured by Swarm, apparently without any kind of resistance, though she wasn't held hostage in the traditional manner. Swarm wanted her to do something for him, she did it, and then she blacked out.

It could have been much worse, and I do realize it. I'm only picking at these few instances because in the whole Bill Mantlo's writing of Darkstar was so good that they really stick out. Heck, Mantlo even had Darkstar save the world, almost single-handedly, in *Champions* #13, and that's a lot more than can be said for lots of other superhero women.

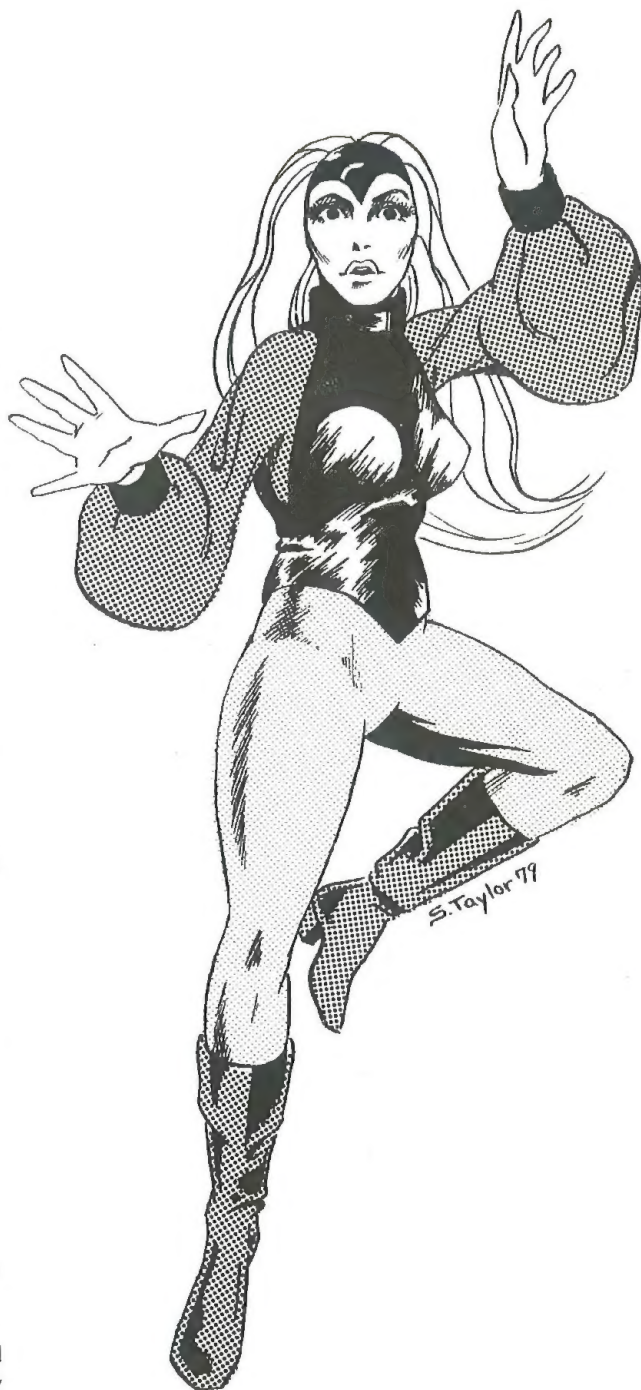
It's almost certain that the early demise of the Champions has ruined a lot of Bill Mantlo's plans for Darkstar. That's a shame, because she had more than the ordinary potential. I think she was a better character than any other created that year. Her unexplained origin leaves great room for growth and exploration. Her self-confidence and imaginative use of her powers

made her visually exciting, though her costume wasn't much to look at even for one like me who doesn't spend a lot of time ogling women in comics. All sorts of hints were dropped about her origin during her stay in *Champions*, especially in that notorious last issue, #17, wherein, among other things already discussed, Darkstar thinks to herself, "At last I understand his (Ghost Rider's) coldness toward me! He thinks I see him as a monster! But if he knew of my birth, he would know that Darkstar is the true unhuman!" Well, so we're unhuman, are we? How interesting. A pity it's likely we'll never get to learn any more about Darkstar. The lettercolumn armadillos claimed her origin would be revealed in *Avengers*, but since we all know Marvel has been playing musical writers lately that hardly seems likely any more.

As of *Iron Man* #109-112, Darkstar has returned home to the U.S.S.R. Everyone assumed she defected in *Champions* #11, but as explained, she was merely staying on as a guest of the Champions by the grace of the Black Widow and Nick Fury. I like that very much. So many of Marvel's "Russian" characters seem to defect at the drop of a hat. I really don't think it's as simple as that. There are many subtle ties that bind people to their homeland, and they aren't severed unless done painfully. This is why I agree with Darkstar's decision to go home after the Champions disintegrated. She, like Colossus of the far-famed X-Men, is faithful to her country. I only hope that when/if she returns to the United States it isn't as a spy. That would be horribly hackneyed, and grossly out of character.

Meanwhile, only the Goddess knows what the future holds for Darkstar. For the rest of us, the whole affair is, well . . . in the dark.

Deby Dunn, 15943 Maracaibo, Hacienda Hgts, CA 91745

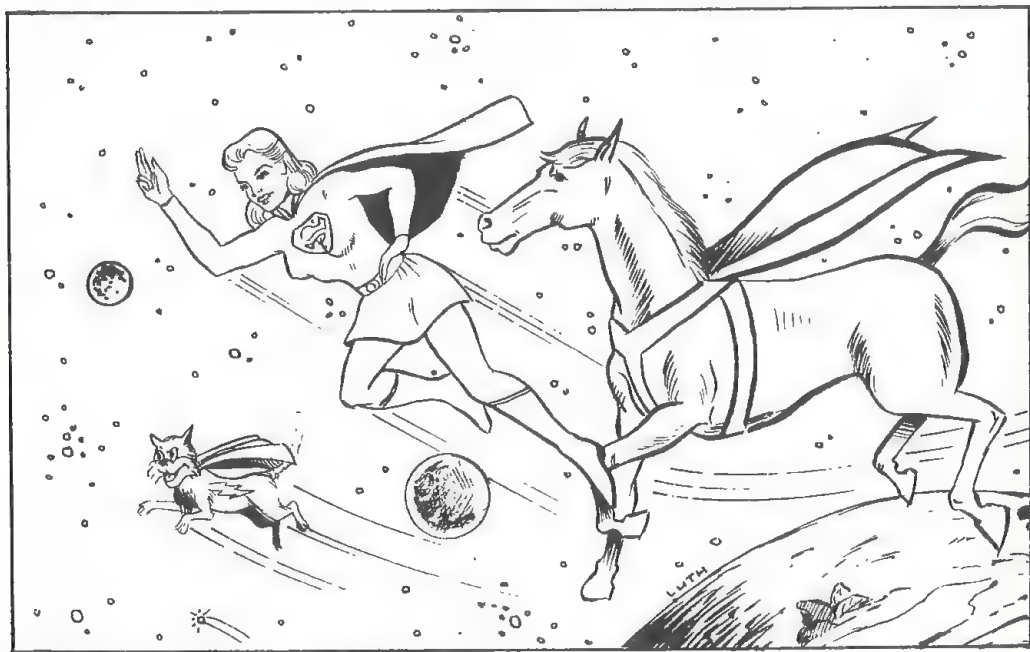


THE HEROINE in ACTION

REVUE

The Supergirl solo series began in *Action Comics* #252. This was in May of 1959. Oddly enough, she departed the pages of this title exactly ten years later — May of 1969 — after #376. She compiled 125 consecutive appearances, an enviable record by anyone's accounts.

Few readers, particularly readers of this 'zine, are unfamiliar with The Maid of Steel's origin. But, for the record, here is a summary of that origin as was first printed in *Action* #252: One day, Clark Kent spied, from his desk at The Daily Planet, a guided missile with a human passenger aboard about to crash outside of Metropolis. He sped to the scene as Superman where he was doubly surprised; the passenger hadn't been killed in the crash of the rocket . . . she hadn't even been injured! What's more, she was wearing a red, yellow and blue outfit nearly identical to his own. The teenaged girl explained that she, too, was from Krypton. Or rather, her parents were. When the planet exploded, a chunk of it carrying an entire city was hurled into space; conveniently, a bubble of air went along with it. A young scientist named



Zor-El saved the rest of the city's inhabitants from certain death when the land on which the town was built turned into kryptonite by covering the ground with a sheet of lead.

Years later, after Zor-El married, he and his wife had a daughter who grew into her teens on this isolated little planetoid. Sometime later, a meteor shower destroyed the protective lead coating, exposing everyone to the kryptonite radiations once again. Only Kara, Zor-El's daughter escaped, because her father launched her into space in a rocket. He deliberately aimed the missile toward Earth, because he had devised a telescope which enabled him to learn of Superman's existence there, and he knew that The Man of Steel had come from Krypton, too.

As the lass recounted this tale to Superman, The Man of Steel realized that Zor-El had been his own father's brother — hence this super-girl was his own first cousin! Neither she nor he were alone in the world any longer.

This was the sum total of Supergirl's origin as it was originally presented. Later accounts would embellish these facts with more details and occasionally with conflicting points. Superman determined that Kara could not live with him in Metropolis without arousing suspicion (and a few eyebrows, no doubt!), so he brought her some more conventional clothes and then took her to Midvale Orphanage. He felt, and his cousin concurred that, until Supergirl was more accustomed to the ways of life on Earth, it would be better if she kept her super-powers a secret. No one would know there was a Supergirl at all! Meantime, she could serve as The Man of Steel's secret weapon in emergencies. At this point, her first adventure came to an end, although the story's final caption promised that there would be more of Supergirl in every issue of *Action Comics*!

The first story was illustrated by Al Plastino, but with #253, one of the definitive Supergirl artists took over — Jim Mooney. "Secret of The Super-Orphan" in this issue introduced what would become a standard formula in many Supergirl adventures — The Maid of Might secretly aided one of her fellow orphans at Midvale, eventually helping him to acquire a new home and family.



Linda Lee, the name Kara assumed as her Terran identity, was nearly adopted in #254 by a dishonest couple who needed an innocent-looking girl to pose as their daughter while they swindled customers in their circus sideshow. It didn't take Supergirl long to tumble to their real motives and she neatly turned the tables on them and returned their ill-gotten gains to the customers.

Crossovers in DC Comics were rare at this time except when various members of the Superman Family guested in each other's strips. But a striking exception to this happened in #255 when Kara journeyed to the 21st Century and met up with a young man who would later become famous as Tommy Tomorrow!

Just as Superman had Lois Lane who continually suspected her hero and Clark Kent of being one and the same, so Supergirl met a fellow orphan named Dick Wilson who suspected Linda of having super-abilities, even though Supergirl was still a secret at large. This was in *Action* #256.

Issue #258 was notable because The Titanic Teen first learned that Clark Kent was her cousin's alter-ego. She also encountered Superman's super-powerful dog Krypto here. This served as a portent of things to come: Supergirl's *own* super pet, Streaky the cat, made his bow in #261. He gained his super-powers from a piece of kryptonite (called X-kryptonite) which his mistress was using in an experiment. His powers would come and go from time to time and Supergirl remained unaware that they were derived from this bit of radioactive mineral.

At this point, The Congorilla series was dropped from *Action* and The Maid of Might's feature jumped from 7-8 pages an issue to 11-13 pages. *Action* #262's recap of her origin was the first to make changes in The Supergirl Legend. Now it was disclosed that the heroine had known Superman was her cousin from the time she was launched in her father's rocket.

Supergirl's first contact with The Legion of Super-Heroes came in #267. She applied for membership and successfully passed her initiation, but a chunk of red kryptonite aged her beyond that allowed by The Legion — she was too old to join!

"Supergirl's First Romance!" happened in *Action* #269 when she met Jerro The Mer-boy from Atlantis. She celebrated her 16th birthday in #270 with guest-stars Jerro, Lori Lemaris, Krypto, Superman, Batman and Robin.

In #272-273 was a two-parter in which The Girl of Steel flew to a distant world and met Marvel Maid, a crimefighter who looked exactly like Kara, and who wore an almost identical costume too!

Another bid for membership in The Legion came in #276's "Supergirl's Three Super-Girl Friends." Saturn Girl, Phantom Girl and Triplicate Girl journeyed back to The Maid of Might's time period and invited her to try for membership in The Legion once more. This time,

Supergirl was successful, and she was initiated into the organization with another new recruit, Brainiac 5. There were mutual feelings of fondness, maybe even love, between the pair.

Streaky and Krypto began a super-feud in #277, the issue which introduced Beppo, The Super-Monkey.

Supergirl's next adventure may rightly be termed an epic. Beginning in *Action* #278, the story was not concluded until #285, making it easily the longest continued story to be published by DC up until that time and for quite awhile afterwards. It was during this multi-issue extravaganza that Superman finally revealed the existence of his cousin to the world!

This many-chaptered saga also introduced Supergirl's arch-foe Lesla-Lar from The Bottle City of Kandor and it re-introduced young Dick Wilson, the boy from Midvale Orphanage who had suspected Linda Lee of having super-powers. But now Dick had been adopted, and his last name was Malverne. In this incarnation, Dick remained in the series as a semi-regular for the full course of its run in *Action*. Linda was adopted during this tale too, by Fred and Edna Danvers of Midvale. She did not immediately share with her foster parents the fact that she was Supergirl, but it was not too many more issues before she did reveal this identity to them.

The Girl of Steel resumed more conventional, one-issue stories following this extra-length adventure. *Action* #290 introduced The Supergirl Emergency Squad. Just like Superman's own squad, Kara's consisted of several young Kandorian girls who donned blond wigs and Supergirl outfits and flew to the aid of their idol whenever conditions necessitated. This tale also guest-starred Phantom Girl from The Legion — she inadvertently exposed her Kryptonian comrade to red kryptonite which this time bestowed super-powers on any earthling Kara or Linda got near. Beneficiaries of this included her foster mother, Dick Malverne and Jerro.

Action #292 gave Supergirl another super-powered pet. This time it was Comet The Super-Horse. In #293, it was revealed that Comet had once been a centaur named Biron, but had fallen under the influence of an evil magician's spell which turned him into a horse. Circe the sorceress took pity on him and gave him super-powers to help make up for the other spell.

Comet became a feature in his mistress's stories far more often than Streaky The Super-Cat. Comet was forever reverting to human form (this happened whenever a comet got close to Earth). Invariably Supergirl would encounter him while he was thusly transformed and she would fall head-over-heels in love with him. Just when things were getting serious, BANG! — the comet would leave and the man would become the horse again. The Maid of Might was never aware that it was actually her super-horse with whom she had been in love.

"The Girl With the X-Ray Mind" in #295 was the first in another multi-part adventure, although this was a shorter one. Kara encountered a mysterious young woman with E.S.P. powers which she utilized to help Supergirl avert disasters. The girl's name was Lena Thorul, but Supergirl later discovered that Lena's real last name had been *Luthor*, and she was, in fact, the sister of Superman's arch-enemy! Lena herself was unaware of this, having been very young when Lex had turned to crime. Their parents quickly changed their last name to Thorul and moved away, telling Lena that her brother had died. Her mother and father died shortly thereafter, and Lena was placed in an orphanage.

As the adventure progressed, Luthor discovered that Lena was his sister. But he did not want her to ever know the shame of having an arch-villain for a brother, so he opted to keep the truth from her. For a time (#298), Lex even aided Superman and Supergirl in defeating several Phantom Zone escapees in exchange for their promise to rescue Lena from Kandor, where she had been imprisoned by Supergirl's old foe Lesla-Lar.

September 1963 brought Supergirl a brand-new costumed arch-villainess. To prove her direct contrast to our heroine, the villainess was introduced in a story called "The Maid of Menace!" (*Action* #304). Black Flame, as she was called, was billed as more cunning than Lesla-Lar and more evil than Luthor; and, indeed, the villainess was a wily and deadly foe who led Supergirl a merry chase before being defeated. Black Flame was an escapee from Kandor, so her super-powers were roughly equal to Supergirl's, making her a tough opponent. In the end, her powers were permanently removed with gold kryptonite.

What a surprise #309 wrought! "The Untold Story of Argo City" revealed that Kara's real parents, Zor-El and Allura were still alive. Just before the destruction of their space-orbiting city, Supergirl's parents escaped into The Survival Zone, a region not unlike the Phantom Zone. In #310, the enterprising young heroine found a way to release them from the ethereal "prison." They went to live in Kandor, giving Linda/Kara two sets of parents!

Lena Thorul returned in *Action* #313. In a bid to join the F.B.I., she was interviewing several inmates in Metropolis Prison. Inadvertently, she wound up talking with her brother Luthor. Her E.S.P. enabled her to learn the whole truth from his subconscious mind. The shock of learning this gave her amnesia. An incredible series of events brought her to Africa where she assumed a heroine-role of her own as Jungle Princess. Eventually her memory returned, but Luthor utilized elements from several distant planets (which Supergirl brought him) to cause Lena to forget everything that had happened to her just after she began interviewing Luthor. Consequently, she did not remember that he was her brother. Although it is unclear whether Lena was ever admitted into The F.B.I., in #317, she did *marry* an F.B.I. agent named Jeff Colby.

Linda Danvers graduated high school in #318 and earned a scholarship to Stanhope College. So off Supergirl went, to begin experiencing the pleasures and pains of college life. One of the pains was a girl named Donna Storm, a snobbish student who attempted to keep Linda out of her sorority. Naturally, Linda's super-powers enabled her to pass the impossibly difficult tasks Donna had given her for initiation. Although Ms. Storm had seemingly reformed at tale's end, in #319, she framed Linda into a robbery charge. With the aid of guest-star Shrinking Violet, Supergirl cleared her alter-ego's name and Donna was expelled.

Tales of everyday life (#325's "Ugly Duckling Teacher of Stanhope College" in which The Maid of Might transformed a shy, plain-Jane professor into a beautiful swan!) were sandwiched in-between adventures of earth-shattering proportions (#329-331's Dr. Supernatural trilogy, which gave Supergirl two wonderful new costumed foes — Supernatural and Fantasa, but both met with well-deserved demises after this single adventure!).

Unfortunately, reprint adventures began popping up on occasion. Dubbed "Hall of Fame Classics," the Supergirl feature in *Action* #341, 343, 351 and 352 were but old Maid of Might and Jimmy Olsen reprints brought out of mothballs.

Action #350 saw Supergirl punching the stuffing out of Green Arrow, Batman and Green Lantern! Actually, the trio were merely jewel thieves who dressed like The Justice Leaguers to aid them in their robberies. They might have succeeded in destroying Supergirl had the *real* Ace-Archer, Caped Crusader and Emerald Guardian not put in timely appearances.

"Superboy in Argo City" was the curious title of a unique tale (*Action* #358) which revealed to readers that Supergirl and Superboy had actually met several years earlier when Superboy visited his cousin's space-city. The meeting really occurred, but fate conspired to make both super-cousins forget the monumental occasion.

That tale was Jim Mooney's last on the Supergirl feature. With #259, Kurt Schaffenberger became The Girl of Steel's third and final artist. Final insofar as he stay in *Action Comics* was concerned . . .



Mr. Mxyzptlk disguised himself as Robin, The Boy Wonder in #362, to give Supergirl a bad time, but Supergirl tumbled to his ruse, and she was able to outwit the little imp as well as Superman had countless times before. Red kryptonite turned The Maid of Might into a Jekyll/Hyde heroine in *Action* #365. Senseless acts of vandalism were being perpetrated on Stanhope campus, most of them involving the destruction of Supergirl artifacts and awards. The finger of suspicion pointed to a student named Leon Jackson. Leon had been in trouble before, and he made no bones about the fact that he hated Supergirl. But he insisted that the mighty heroine was actually framing him. Sure enough, he was right! This was due, naturally to the kryptonite, although Supergirl did not realize this until its effects had finally worn off.

A pair of renegade young women named Alpha and Beta came to Stanhope from the far future. They imprisoned all of the students and staff and placed a large, impenetrable bubble over the entire college. If anyone attempted to smash the bubble, it would blow up, destroying everything and everyone inside. The villainesses' reason for this incredible scheme was to force a young student named Dave Carew into giving them a secret formula they mistakenly believed he had invented. Linda Danvers was unable to rescue everyone because she had exposed herself deliberately to gold kryptonite, removing her powers. How she managed to regain her super-abilities is a secret best disclosed only by reading *Action Comics* #366-368 for yourself. Suffice it to say that this adventure may well have been the pinnacle of Supergirl's adventures in this title.

Her final tale was a two-parter in #375 and #376 which had The Daughter of Krypton attempting to find a cure for a Stanhope professor's blindness, which Supergirl thought she had caused. Although it was later revealed that a group of aliens had been responsible, our heroine was instrumental in helping return Professor Marla Alexander's eyesight. Not a bad finale for Supergirl . . .

Of course, Supergirl went on to trade places with The Legion of Super-Heroes, gaining her own booklength feature in *Adventure Comics*, but *that* series will be examined in my next column. Rather, let's briefly and comprehensively examine her *Action*-run.

Most of the stories were curiously non-violent. Some had almost no action in them whatsoever, particularly the earliest ones which always had Supergirl aiding people secretly. Clearly

these tales were intended for a much younger, female audience. Hence the preoccupation with romance and the addition of a cat and horse as pets for Linda/Supergirl. Every girl wants a kitten and a horse, right? That fact is debatable, of course, but remember that these tales were written in the late Fifties and early Sixties. Aside from "funny" funny books and romance titles, comics did not cater to females. Here, at least, was an attempt to give girls a super-hero of their own.



Formula-writing characterizes most of Supergirl's adventures; but then, formula also characterized most Superman, Superboy, Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen stories, also. Supergirl's capers centered frequently on such things as teaching fellow orphans and fellow classmates lessons in humility, falling in love with many and varied beaux, trying to dissuade suspicious characters from thinking Linda Lee Danvers was Supergirl, and helping people and animals in any way that she could. Corny? Yeah, but aren't these goals basically what *all* super-heroes are striving for?

Some of the plots in this series were ludicrous; they featured awkward and unbelievable plots, virtually no characterizations and inane dialogue. But some of the stories were very good. On the whole, the Supergirl feature in *Action* was a quality number. And a lot of people must've liked it, since it was promoted to its own monthly book. But again, that's another story, one for next issue.

Scott Gibson * 2711 S. Pinehurst Dr. * Evergreen, CO 80439



CLUB NEWS

by Nick Chinn

It looks pretty good that the long-awaited second issue of *The United Kingdom Heroines Showcase* will be sent out with this mailing to our subscribers. We're confident that you will agree it was worth the wait. Your price is right, too, at the CHFC subscriber's price of \$1.00 (as opposed to the \$1.50 cover price).

For the poor non-subscribers who are not at this moment enjoying Lela Dowling's full processed color covers on THS/UK #2, you can ask your local comic dealer to stock copies of this treasure if he hasn't already. Or you can order direct from us (\$1.75 via first class mail, or \$1.60 via third class mail).

You might also give a thought to subscribing to the CHFC publications because coming up soon is the *THS Art Portfolio* #2, featuring the art of Lela Dowling . . . we have some old and new pieces from her works. Not to give anything away, but THS/AP #2 will also feature full processed color covers by Lela.

Work is still plodding slowly on *The Adventuress* #9, mostly because of a delay in the Ixiona feature. For those of you who have contributed illos for this installment, please bear with us. We'll get this book out as soon as possible so you can all appreciate the wraparound cover by Joe Chiodo and Brent Anderson, and the centerfold by Rudi Franke.

Missing Subscribers Dept., again — R. Michael Griswold (formerly of Houston, TX); Jerald Magid (Los Angeles, CA); Wes Smith (Paw Paw, MI); and John Wentworth (Alhambra, CA). Let us know if these people still exist.

THS #16 was collated quite remarkably on the counter of the Comics & Comix shop in Palo Alto, CA. Thanks to John Seligson and Chip Rich for assisting in the job. Working with Steve on the stapling and trimming was Adrienne Foster, and Lynne Pope with the mailing.

The LOCs we received in response to the last issue were much appreciated. U.S. fans might note that British fans are making it a tight race as to which country sends in the most letters, although in terms of subscribers, they are outnumbered more than 10 to 1.

The striking cover for this issue was contributed by Trina Robbins, and features a selection of major jungle heroines from the Golden Age. See if you can identify them all. No prizes are offered, but we will have the answers in our next issue. Steve takes the blame/credit for manually doing the color separations for the cover, but not the shaky job by our printer.

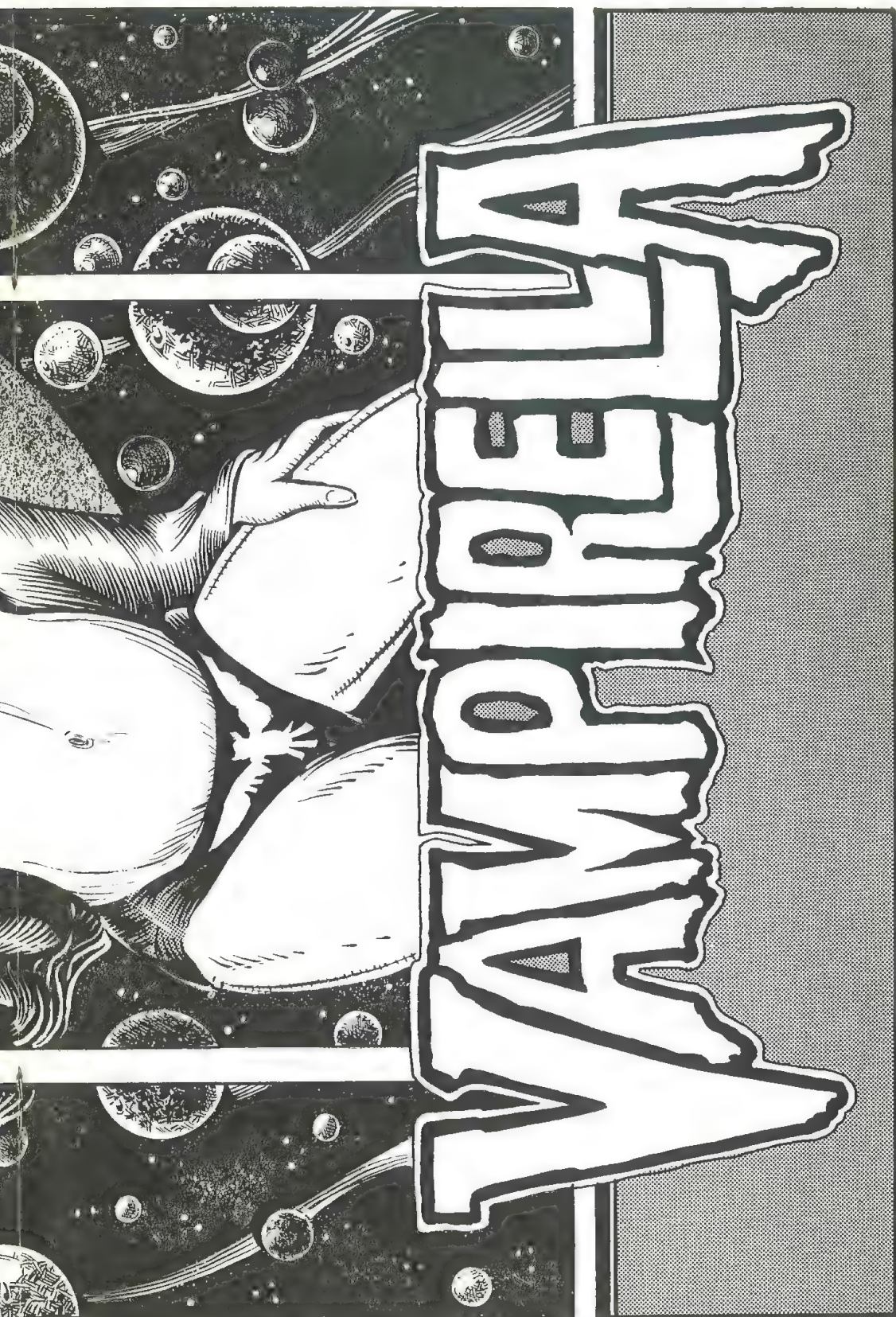
No one seemed to notice that besides being reversed out (white on black instead of black on white), our THS logo on #16 had gone under some modification by Brent and Steve. We'd like to think that it has a little more dramatic flare.

One last note . . . we hope you don't start demanding the packaging we used to put together THS/UK #2 on a regular basis. Although it is superb and attractive, the time and cost is prohibitive for our type of operation. But we hope to continue improving the packaging and graphics of our zines as our abilities and resources increase, though you might again have to settle for one and possibly two color covers, and unjustified copy for awhile.



NICK CHINN





NO 17

JULY
12/79

SND



THE LOVELY CHARMS OF LEIKO WU, MISTRESS OF MASTER OF KUNG FU

Aside from the first few issues, which were scripted by Steve Englehart, and passing in discreet silence over Gerry Conway's abortive stab at the title, *Master of Kung Fu* has been the work of one author, aided by a host of artists ranging from the sublimely slick to the colourlessly competent. The Kung Fu craze has come and gone, but Doug Moench remains, guiding the unfolding complexities of what must surely rank as Marvel's longest running *novel*, a monthly joy to read and doubtlessly the most tightly woven comic currently in publication. Combine equal parts of Will Eisner's rainsoaked emotionalism with the psychotronic spy thrillers of Jim Steranko. Garnish with more than a taste of *My Secret Love Story* - and there you have it - one comic, well done. This article purports to be an overview of Leiko Wu, but without Doug Moench there would be no Leiko Wu to view, and so, before plunging into a consideration of fiction as if it were reality, I should like to stand alone for a moment on the gritty docks of my mind's eye, beneath a full Piscean moon, and whisper into the cat-footed fog, "You done good, Doug. You done real good."

Master of Kung Fu began in December of 1973, but it wasn't until exactly one year later that the first heroic woman entered the strip. The issue was *Giant-Size Master of Kung Fu* #3 and the heroine was Sandy, a Eurasian martial arts expert working for British Intelligence. Shang Chi, the naive young man whose deadly hands are the ostensible stars of the book, falls in love and murders his beloved in one action-packed night. Even though his father Fu Manchu's hallucinogenic drugs are the force which propels this tragedy to its ultimate conclusion, Shang Chi takes the guilt for Sandy's death upon himself. It is to Moench's credit that almost a year passes before another woman enters Shang's life.

It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic entrance either. Arriving at the "quasi-oriental" apartment he has just been given by Sir Denis Nayland Smith, neither Shang Chi nor his comrade Clive Reston notice that the lock has been picked. Shang hears a slight noise in the next room, rushes in . . . and finds a naked woman in his bathtub! The woman is Leiko Wu ("She reminds me of . . . Sandy . . .") and, as becomes quickly obvious, she and Clive Reston have shared more than a few memories. Leiko plays the role of a vixen, posing flirtatiously, taunting poor Clive, who obviously loves her still, casting her net for the much younger Shang Chi. Aside from the aesthetic merits of Leiko's arrival on the scene, her entry serves to introduce one of Moench's recurrent themes - the unlocked door. The spies who people this title must, as agents of deceit and death, keep more than houses locked. Their very hearts are sealed. Those few who leave themselves or their doors open pay the price. Shang Chi and Reston did not leave the door unlocked - Leiko had to force an entrance. Perhaps this was deceitful of her, but how else can a spy attain the secret citadels of another agent's heart?

Wait a minute! Why would a spy *want* to attain the secret citadels, etc.? Isn't this comic book about Kung Fu? Haaaaiiaaahh! and all that . . .

Well . . . uh . . . sort of. The truth is that while *MoKF* earns its living by day as a moody espionage thriller ("Martial Arts Madness in the Mighty Marvel Manner"), by night it moonlights as a slow and tender exploration of human love and trust, pain and betrayal. Just yer basic multi-leveled comic, scarce as duck's teeth these days.

Leiko Wu, heroine supreme, sprang full grown, like Aphrodite, from the bathtub. She's a tough cookie, a dead shot, packs a mean karate and she sure don't take no jive from Clive. She's non-sexist, non-racist and non-fattening. If I wanted to write about Leiko in those terms, I could hang up my typewriter right now, 'cause I've just said it all. "Leiko's Greatest Battles" may be a future bestseller — but Doug Moench ain't writing it and I ain't reviewing it. The story which interests me is not the bread and butter blockbuster of Mighty Marvel Mayhem, it is Moench's elliptical tale of how a snazzy Steranko type super-agent becomes a loving, caring woman.

Although Leiko's "origin" (odd word, that) has never been revealed, the issue which introduced her delved a little into her recent past. It seems she left poor Clive Reston for another spy, one Simon Bretnor aka Mordillo, now discovered to have been a madman as well as a traitor. A few pages after her debut, Leiko succumbs to that most ignoble of heroine's fates — she is kidnapped by her schizophrenic ex-lover. By issue #35, Shang Chi and Reston, the latter mumbling jealously bitter remarks to his apparently oblivious partner, rescue her from a rather bizarre death — suffocation by sand. Sexual jealousy, in Moench's world, ranks right up there with money and power as a motivating force for his characters. This is especially evident when a villainess named Pavane makes her reappearance. First seen in *MoKF* #31, where she seemed more intent on posing for pinup pictures than fighting, Pavane now justifies her former ineffectuality in defending the Jewish drug dealer Carlton Velcro by stating that she was *meant* to fail, being actually in the employ of Mordillo, who was being offered a cool million for Velcro's head. Not only is she, Pavane, Mordillo's current paramour, but she has a rather violent personal grudge against Leiko for having been his lover while he was playing at being Bretnor. "That alone," she says, "is enough to cause me . . . to destroy your face." And by the time all the fighting is over and Pavane is captured, Leiko and Shang Chi find themselves in an unexpected embrace, while Reston eats his heart out.



Rather than dwell on his new heroine at this point, Moench provides some well-planned contrast by introducing, in issue #38, the two most interesting characters who have ever fought on the wrong side of the fence in this series. Neither are strictly "villains," each being rather a complementary negative image to those of the major protagonists. Shang Chi leaves London under orders to protect a British agent named Juliette from a man known as Shen Kuei or Cat. The only trouble is that Juliette has fallen in love with Cat and doesn't want to betray him or leave the Orient. Where Leiko is strong, Juliette is "weak"; where Leiko's door is locked, Juliette has no door at all, merely a bed curtain, through which all men may enter. Shen Kuei too performs a villain's highest function, reacting as the hero would in similar circumstances, had not a provident fate arranged it otherwise. Ultimately there is no reason for the pair to fight and Shang Chi leaves when Juliette compels Shen Kuei's love by an act of self-destruction.

Meanwhile, back in London, Reston picks the lock on Leiko's door and surprises her at T'ai Chi. They argue after the manner of old lovers. Reston accuses Leiko of needing an army of men and she in turn points out that he isn't man enough for her. Although his motives are far from pure, he speaks the truth when he says that the younger Shang Chi is too naive and innocent for her. He ought to know. It was his own weakness she despised. Like many women who have absorbed society's expectations in addition to developing their own strengths, Leiko exults in her power while simultaneously looking for a man who can dominate her. Clive Reston, with his greenhouse full of orchids and his reliance on weapons in combat, is no match for the daring and resourceful Leiko Wu. Not only can she out-shoot him, she is also an expert in the martial arts. Besides, he cries when he is sad. But can she be happy with Shang Chi, a "boy" who can't even drive a car? Reston needles her until she turns and strikes him, at which point he crumbles. Her response is to embrace him, not because she loves him still, but simply because she's hurt him once again.

In issue #40, Shang Chi and Black Jack Tarr find Leiko's door unlocked. By now the reader has been cued to respond to this device and, knowing Leiko's guardedness, anticipates some kind of trouble. Sure enough, she is found in the clutches of a gang of enemy agents. Her escape (or rescue, if you will) over, she prepares to depart on a suicide mission to Switzerland, baffling the all-too-innocent Shang when she says she has told Reston that they are "in love," a *fait accompli* which Shang does not accede to. He may be a naive boy, but if he loves, it will be on his own terms, not at her whim. She leaves abruptly, half sorrowful woman and half thwarted vamp.

Black Jack and Shang next journey on to the house of Larner, an agent who has been discharged due to his cowardice. Of course *his* door is open, and the man himself, all tradecraft forgotten, is stinking drunk. With him is the cast-off Reston, similarly wasted. It's all Leiko's bloody fault. Because of Leiko, says Larner, his beloved Jennie, another agent, met her death behind the iron curtain. Because he later failed to pick up the wounded Leiko, he himself was booted from the service and branded a traitor. The bombing of Larner's flat by enemy agents puts an end to the discussion, but it seems that little Leiko has left more than just a string of broken hearts in her wake.

Amidst the intrigues and the unhealed wounds of past betrayals, Leiko, Reston and Shang Chi try to accomplish a delicate mission in Switzerland. They separate, and typically, Leiko takes a motorcycle while Reston drives the a-cultured Shang Chi in a car. Leiko is captured but escapes on her own while Shang Chi finds a conveniently unlocked door and rashly enters. Both he and Reston are trapped by his wicked half-sister, Fa Lo Suee.

Issue #45 marks the official beginning of a six-part story, each chapter narrated by one



of the major characters, although the plot itself has roots going back to issue #39. The major villain is Dr. Fu Manchu and the basic action is an attempt to stop him from pulling the moon out of its orbit. Extravagant though this scheme is, the finest aspect of this epic is the light it sheds on the protagonists as each in turn describes a portion of the action through subjective eyes. In #45, Shang Chi relates how Leiko saves both him and Reston. The rescue is predictable enough, the tension residing in the fact that she can only be *sure* of saving *one* of the two — and she chooses Shang, much to Reston's chagrin.

Reston's bitterness escalates in scope as he narrates issue #46. His folly is ill-concealed when he goes so far as to challenge Shang to fight over Leiko, right in the middle of a chase scene! Of course Leiko puts an end to *that* madness, but Reston goes off alone to stop Fa Lo Suee. His only reward is an ignominious defeat. Hypnotised and drugged, his passions turned against his reason, Reston is left in the snow, begging for just one more kiss from those evil ruby lips. Although a quick psychotronic fix-up job by MI-6 puts his head back together, the secret is out — Reston doesn't lock his mental doors. A weakling.

Leiko's portion of the "six-parter" marks a definite turning point in Moench's characterization of her as a heroine. Up until this time, we have perceived Leiko by the trail she leaves, a trail of broken hearts, locked doors and dead partners. Now, inside Leiko's mind, the situation is far clearer — Leiko admits that her "love" for Shang Chi is "founded on his strength" — and that she herself lives behind a "mask." When Shang tells her that she is actually stronger in spirit than he is, she can't face it, just as she feels that "needing" him is a weakness. In the most *True Romance*-like scene which *MoKF* has sported to date (is this an unconscious response on Moench's part to having a female narrator?), Leiko and Shang make love in a cave amidst the "phantom sand" of snow. There are no doors on a cave at all.

The real hero of the Fu Manchu plot isn't Leiko, however, nor even Shang Chi. The center of events proves to be Larner, the cashiered agent whose courage has been in doubt. His death, which comes while saving Leiko Wu, is one of the most perfectly realized tragedies ever to appear in comics.

From the moment where Leiko is seen to cry at Larner's funeral, her life begins to change. Unlike the facile bouts of "self doubt" most comics authors love to slam their readers with, Leiko's reconsideration of her life is slow and almost unconscious. Most of the transitions occur by means of contrast, a technique Moench uses over and over again in this series. Since the balance of yin and yang is the basic theme of Shang Chi's existence, these subtle shifts from thesis to antithesis are well suited to the story. Leiko is too yang, too forceful, and too callous for the gentle Shang, as Reston pointed out. The differences in their attitude toward violence are particularly noticeable. Leiko is inclined to use more force than necessary; Shang Chi has learned to balance his actions to the need at hand. The contrast between their methods is explored beginning in issue #51, where Shang Chi tries to stop her from succumbing to the "temptation" of shooting a man. The implication is clear — those who use weapons rather than their hands to deal out death run the risk of not understanding fully what they are doing. Shang's morality stands in opposition to the shoot-em-up tactics of his fellow agents — and only Leiko, who knows both Western and Eastern forms of violence, can even begin to understand him. At this point, however, she is still too yang, and the "temptation" carries her beyond necessity. She shoots and kills the man. Shang Chi says nothing, though and even this event does not impede the development of their love.

By issue #54, Shang seems to have moved in with Leiko, sleeping, Marvel-style, on her couch. The exigencies of the comics industry are served when Leiko is kidnapped again (ho hum). The dastardly perpetrator of this redundant outrage is another schizophrenic, named Eric Slaughter aka War-Yore. What is it that these sickies see in Leiko? In between trying to escape and trying to sweet-talk her way into War-Yore's disturbed psyche, Leiko somehow manages to make a break for freedom, just as reinforcements arrive. One of Moench's few garish continuity flaws appears in this segment as the captive Leiko, standing erect (albeit with a gun to her head) in the last panel of issue #57, is displayed in a fashionable faint on the splash page of the next issue. But now the promised contrast appears, as Leiko regains consciousness and tries to talk poor War-Yore out of his senseless frenzy, only to witness both



Shang and Reston succumbing to the "temptation" of violence. Shang merely kung fus the deranged fellow, but Reston, gun in hand, bursts in and kills him. Unlike the philosophical Shang Chi, Leiko doesn't take this turn of events lightly. No matter that the men thought her life was in danger - she stages a stormy scene and walks out on both of them, heedless of the fact that she herself has often played the role which Reston plays.

An interlude with Dr. Doom, although paying clever homage to Steranko's best work on S.H.I.E.L.D., does nothing to deepen the development of the characters, most of them being robots, as is the custom in these Latverian chess games. Issue #61 resumes the central threads of the drama as Leiko and Shang, now apart, play Fleetwood Mac songs and feel miserable. Reston, meanwhile, has found a woman who admires him, in the person of Melissa Greville, Nayland Smith's secretary (and daughter of Shan Greville, from the original Sax Rohmer books). Miss Greville, as she is usually called, is a giddy middle class woman, inclined to view the dirty games of deceit and death in a most romantic light. Her slightly simple-minded innocence is a perfect foil for Leiko's growing realization that being strong doesn't mean not crying. Leiko cries a lot now, bursting in on Reston and begging him to tell her where Shang Chi has gone. "What's *wrong* with me?" she moans, "What's happened? How did I become so *weak*?" Reston's reply is remarkably kind, considering the torments he has suffered at her hands. "What's *wrong* with you, Leiko-darlin'?" For *one* thing you're convinced that needing someone is a weakness. Maybe that's why I lost you . . . because Lord knows *I* cried often enough when *you* stopped comin' 'round." And what of Shang Chi? A note from Juliette has sent him back to Hong Kong. We always go where we are needed most.

Events in the Orient are no less complicated than in London. Juliette has left Shen Kuei and seeks to stop his "evil" work for the Red Chinese. As for Cat himself, he has now taken up with the whip-flicking Pavane, who apparently escaped off panel after her capture back in issue #35. Shen Kuei, who owes Shang Chi his life, is bound by honour to send others to kill his enemy, so, in addition to Pavane, he hires a man called Skull Crusher to perform the task. Meanwhile, the resourceful Leiko and the unlikely team of Reston and Miss Greville have arrived on the scene, only to find that Black Jack Tarr has already infiltrated the enemy stronghold. Upstream, unbeknownst to all of them, Shang Chi and Juliette embrace, although Shang still can't forget Leiko. As I said earlier, the fight scenes are the bread and butter of this title - the real interest lies in the area of human relationships. This sequence holds two important, albeit brief, moments of tension - Miss Greville, her face screwed up in terror, fires her first gun; and Leiko realizing that Shang Chi is now with Juliette, gulps down her anguish and rescues both of them. Her only reward is to see them leave together while she stands looking on.

As a result of his actions in this episode, Shen Kuei takes on an even more ambiguous role, changing sides at the last moment and being allowed to escape with Pavane. The distinction between "good" and "bad" is rapidly eroding, but betrayal is still the line which demarcates the boundaries. When Juliette betrays both Skull Crusher and Shang Chi in issue #69, her "weakness" looks a lot worse than Shen Kuei's outlaw actions - and when her betrayal is echoed by Black Jack Tarr's old lover Anna in issue #70, it seems that Moench is trying to make a point about the true basis of love. Black Jack has locked his doors well, but the locks have been picked. He opens the doors in perfect confidence - but they slam shut behind him and he is trapped, doubly trapped by dangerous foes and by his own memories of love. His escape is more a question of giving up his ties to the past than the purely physical actions of evading death.

These digressive plots set the scene for the reunion of Shang Chi and Leiko Wu, both much chastened now, both ready to forego heroic excitement for an evening of jigsaw puzzles, love and pizza. There's only one flaw in their plan to shut away the world - they forget to lock the door. A battered and bleeding Nayland Smith brings the games of deceit and death right into their living room, and the simultaneous arrival of Reston, Miss Greville and a pitiful villain called Shockwave completes the scene. But there is more to the following events than just another recrudescence of Leiko's affinity for schizophrenic villains - when asked to shoot a man in cold blood, she refuses for once to do it, an act as thoughtful as the simultaneous failure of Melissa Greville to fire *her* weapon in self-defense is stupid. Greville is afraid of

(continued on pg. 33)

SUN GIRL

"Flying Fists and Glamour" - 7 pgs.

Sun Girl #1 - Aug. 1948

Golden Age Girls

by Steve Johnson

The sound of heavy running feet breaks the silence of a side street at twilight as two bank robbers race to their waiting escape vehicle. And as the grim getaway car speeds thru the streets, a slim figure clings to the rear of the car . . . The Sun Girl!

As the hoods reach their hideout, The Sun Girl moves to the roof of the car. A well struck blow behind the head puts down the driver as he steps from the car. The second hood, believing the first must have passed out, steps out and into the reaches of The Sun Girl.

And on the other side, completely unaware of what happened to the other two bank robbers, the third one steps blithely out of the car, and The Sun Girl provides a little head-to-head contact between the second and third thugs to complete the rout.

Meanwhile inside the shack, the ring leader begins to wonder what is delaying the guys who he believes have arrived. The Sun Girl descends from the roof of the car, crashes through the shack's door, and knocks out the waiting crook in the same motion.

An hour later, back in town The Sun Girl delivers the four criminals to the police station to a surprised desk sergeant, and then asks to see the chief of police. Informed that the chief is out of town, The Sun Girl makes a dramatic entrance into the chief's office using her sunbeam as a spotlight on the male secretary to identify herself. She then discusses with the secretary the sudden wave of bank robberies which had broken out the past few weeks. She outlines her plan to set a trap using herself as the bait by making a radio speech challenging the head crook. As she departs, she tells the secretary that the papers have been notified that she would be entering the radio station through the emergency exit in the alley, the most likely spot for an ambush.

And so, knowing full well that every underworld denizen in the city might be lurking somewhere in the alley, every man of crime who has vowed her doom might be aiming a gun at her that very second, The Sun Girl hastens toward the emergency door. But instead of opening the door, The Sun Girl suddenly leaps up to the overhanging fire escape. And as she swings up the fire-escape, she lashes out with her foot, breaking the light above the door.

The Sun Girl is not disappointed in her efforts to thwart an ambush. A second later, from the darkness a shot rings out - missing its mark because of The Sun Girl's lighting move. But the flash from the revolver tells The Sun Girl where the assassin is lurking, and a flying leap ensnares the man by the throat. The Sun Girl's firm grasp forces the name of the leader from the man.



*Costume: Yellow top with slit back;
black collar, belt & flared gloves;
black tights with flared yellow boots
Hair/eyes: Blonde/blue*

A few minutes later, at the home of Glenn Darwin, the police chief's secretary, Darwin anxiously paces the floor. The radio announces that there would not be the scheduled broadcast by The Sun Girl because she had vanished. Suddenly The Sun Girl appears on the second-story window ledge and flashes her sunbeam on Darwin. She pinpoints him as the criminal leader as he had actually been the only one she had told of her route to the radio station.

Like greased lightning, the man's hand lashes into his desk drawer for a gun, but even faster are the breath-taking movements of The Sun Girl as she vaults the desk and deflects his aim. A well-twisted arm forces a confession, and a few minutes later she turns Darwin over to the officers she had waiting downstairs.

And after having caught the bank robbers, recovered 3/4 of a million dollars and trapped their leader, what does she request from an officer in a whisper? Subway fare home — she was broke.

The title of this, her first story, sums up Sun Girl's solo adventures nicely. The writing is competent and each episode usually featured a teaser at the end. The simplistic art style helps to gracefully delineate Sun Girl. She is portrayed quite heroically and capably in these stories, and being accomplished in judo and acrobatics as well as her fists, would think nothing of tackling 3 or 4 thugs by herself.



This is in contrast to her appearances as the Human Torch's "girl Friday" where she would be held captive, left behind to worry, faint, or portray other typical heroine roles. For example in her role in the legendary Human Torch-Captain America team-up in *Human Torch* #33 (reprinted in *Giant-Size Avengers* #1) she only managed to squeeze 8 lines into the 10 panels in which she appeared, and did nothing more than express worry and concern, and prematurely jump to the conclusion that both heroes were dead when Cap caught the plummeting Torch.

Outside her lightning-fast reflexes and physical skills, Sun Girl's only gimmick was her sunbeam. This device could project a brilliant beam of light, and while it apparently could be used at different settings, it was more an occasionally used light source than a weapon. No energy source was indicated for it but it apparently could supply light (*continued on pg. 33*)

"The Mysterious Beauty" appeared in:

Captain America #69 (Nov. 1948)
w/ Human Torch

Giant-Size Avengers #1 (Aug. 1974)
rpt. Human Torch #33

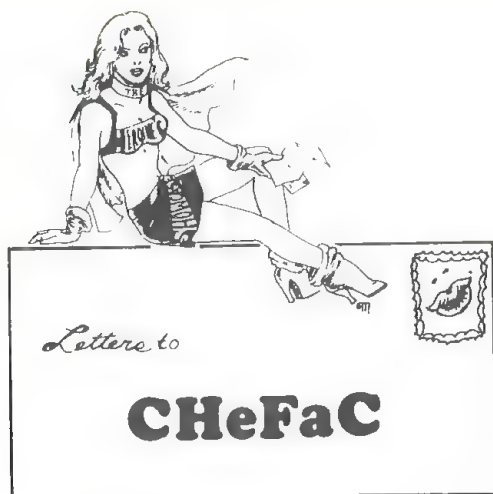
Human Torch #32-35 (Sep. 1948 - Mar. 1949)
w/ Human Torch #32-35; 2 stories #32,34; also solo #34
cover app. #32,34

Marvel Mystery #88-91 (Oct. 1948 - Feb. 1949)
solo #88-90; also w/ Human Torch #88-91
cover app. #88,90,91

Marvel Tales #97 (Sep. 1950)

Sun Girl #1-3 (Aug. 1948 - Dec. 1948)
3 stories #1,2; 2 stories #3; cover app. #1-3

Steven R. Johnson, P.O. Box 1329, Campbell, CA 95008



Dear Steve,

I just received *THS* #16 and it was, as usual, excellent.

Gary Winnick did an excellent wraparound cover, though if the scene is of characters from some comic, book, etc., I'm afraid I don't recognize them. I wouldn't be surprised to see Gary go pro one of these days.

Probably my favorite feature this go-round was the interview with Chris Claremont by Margaret O'Connell. It was especially interesting since the entire interview dealt solely with the writing of *Ms. Marvel* and we were able to see his likes and dislikes of the series. It may seem academic now, of course, since her comic has been cancelled, but she now appears in *The Avengers* and there's always the chance she could have her title revived.

My second favorite article was "The Spirit's Women" by Cat Yronwode which gave us some insight into the many ladies and other females who have surrounded Denny Colt since his inception. It was truly a well-written article.

I enjoyed "The Heroine Review of 1978" which gave us a rundown of the year's most seen women. Next year will be interesting as we've already seen the revival of *The Rose* and *The Thorn*.

Stan Giesea's illo of Barbra Streisand was excellent, though I feel it's a bit out of place here. Those in super-hero/adventure roles I'll go along with (*Bionic Woman*, *Lynda Carter* as *WW*, *Police Woman* even) but Streisand?

My biggest disappointment this ish is the lack of artwork by Lela Dowling and Mercy Van Vlack. Other than that, I have few complaints.

I'm a relative newcomer (my first ish was #12) but I plan to continue enjoying *THS* for quite some time.

Roger Schoolcraft
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The cover of *THS* #16 featured Jane Fonda in her role as *Barbarella*, and the evil *Queen Shupe* and a couple of her goons from the same movie. And Gary has gone professional. During a stint at *Continuity* 2 years ago he colored the covers for the first dollar-size issues of *House of Mystery* and *Superman Family* (both Neal Adam's covers) among other work, and also did work for the short lived *Gasm* magazine.

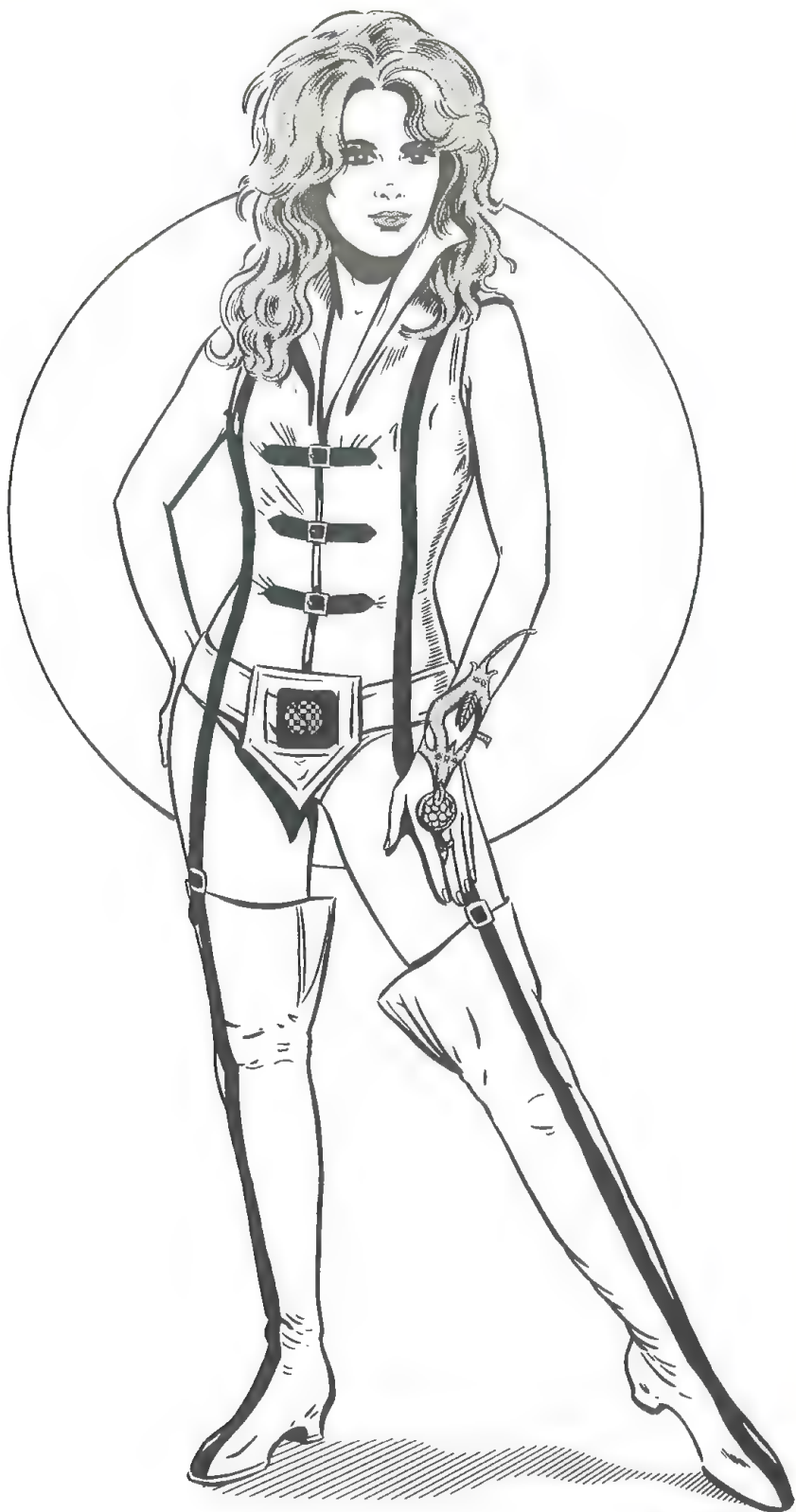
As the only woman in the top 10 boxoffice draws, *Streisand* must have some special standing, but actually, *Stan* idolizes her and it was a means to get him to do the portrait of *Lynda Carter* for this issue!

We've been keeping *Lela* busy working on U.K. and her A.P. but we managed to get a *Leiko Wu* illo from her for this issue. (But you did overlook *Lela's* rendering of me last issue!) And some of *Mercy's* work may still be squeezed into this issue, but if not, you'll definitely see her in U.K. -SRJ

Dear Mr. Johnson

Thanks for *THS* #16. My last experience with the CHFC was *THA* #9, after which personal problems necessitated my "retirement" from fandom for a while, so you can imagine my surprise at the change! A pleasant surprise, I hurriedly add; a superb cover, more thoughtful articles with less of a "gossip-column" feel, and a much higher production standard. My only reservation lies with the title; being a lover of awful puns, I always preferred *The Heroine Addict*, and in comics shops I should think it would make a casual browser double-take and look again, something *THS* probably wouldn't do.

The Claremont interview was fascinating — Chris has to be *Marvel's* best current writer, (overlooking, for charity's sake, the exhumation of cliches in the last few *X-Men*, or the truly awful *Captain Britain* . . . after all, we all have off days, yes?) and his "new" *Ms. Marvel* came across as a genuine, conscientious effort at an action heroine, rather than another *Marvel* "breasts & bondage" object. So, predictably, it gets cancelled, and they started hyping instead the tedious *Spider-Woman*,



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who spends more time in chains than anyone since "Conan's convenient cover-girls" . . . sad, but all too typical.

But the best aspect of *THS*, for me is "Golden Age Girls" . . . no, I'm not grovelling to the publisher; you see, I'm something of a hard-facts fiend, and since Golden Age comics are even rarer and more expensive here than in your country, any data on the books of that period is bound to find an appreciative audience.

I wasn't enamoured of Starr Flagg, particularly, but the *idea* behind the column I like, and I'd like to suggest some future subjects, if I may; Marvel seemed to have had more success with heroines in the 40's than they have in the 70's, so articles on Miss Fury, the Blonde Phantom, Namora, Sun Girl or particularly Venus (for unknown reasons, the concept of a heroine using love as a *power* to overthrow enemies, as opposed to the insipid "romantic interest" way love's usually presented, appeals to me; wasn't that idea one of WW's original motifs before she got into the discipline & restraint biz?) would be welcome. Likewise Miss Masque, Bulletgirl, Batwoman, Liberty Belle, the original Black Orchid, Black Cat, Wildfire, the Black Widow (of whom there were at least two, from different companies), or the Phantom Lady, who's passed through the hands of *at least* five companies, and whose confusing career could stand a little unscrambling! Of course, the "Golden Age Girls" title doesn't restrict it to heroines, so should you tire of "good" girls, items on Catwoman, Harlequin, Cheetah or the original Rose & Thorn would be quite in order.

Anyway, that's enough to keep you busy for a while, I think — and it will at least show that someone *is* out here taking an interest, something your Mr. Chinn didn't seem too sure of.

In closing, let me congratulate you once more on *THS*; having dumped the sometimes slightly fetishist outlook of the early days, I'm sure, you're headed for even greater success in the future. And now that *THS* is a mag I can *enjoy* reading, (rather than just buying it because I feel I *ought* to support the *principle* of the think) I can guarantee my support, for what it's worth, in future plans.

Howard W. Stangroom
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If potential buyers only do a double-take when they see our zine because of a worn out pun, they would probably be doing it for the wrong reasons. And, if we aren't doing a good enough job in attracting that second look without the pun, we aren't doing the job that we should be doing.

I haven't started it at this point, but GAG should be featuring Sun Girl this time. Namora is also high on the list when I secure a copy of #3 to complete my run. Venus will work her way in somewhere along the line as will the others as I secure the appropriate materials. And if you missed the lengthy piece on Phantom Lady in The Comic World #10, I'd recommend writing Bob Jennings for a copy as I'd be hard pressed to surpass the scope of that article. -SRJ



Dear Steve,

I just received my order of CHFC back issues and I was most pleased to find an article about my favorite short-lived heroine, The Black Orchid, in issue 12. I'm afraid that I don't follow the Superman family of characters closely enough to know whether I agree with Carol Strickland's assertion that she is Lucy Lane. I rather hope not. I think that would probably eliminate any possibility of Orchid's return. I like Orchid for several reasons; the main one is that she is the only super character who seems to have fun and really enjoy her talents. I liked her abilities in disguise and acting. I did think her actions in her last appearance a bit crude (particularly throwing the vault door through the roof) and out of character.

I found the Thompson/Delorme article on jungle heroines interesting. I have always had the problem of suspending my disbelief for imaginary happenings in African settings, or even the Amazon basin, when it comes to "wild person" or "white savage." Too much is known about both places. They are losing their romance, particularly if one knows just how dirty nasty tropical rain forests are. Now, if someone wanted to write an alternate world story where Africa was truly a dark continent isolated, say, by physical and other barriers (sort of a dry Bermuda Triangle) and perhaps history and technology were somewhat different from ours, then I might be able to enjoy the Jungle King/Queen story. Anybody want to try?

I got a real chuckle out of Lela Dowling's opening drawing for the article on "The Warlock Women." I imagine that that is exactly how Gamora originally felt about Adam Warlock. I felt that way for a bit, until the series got going.

On *THS* #16, thanks for the look behind the scenes with Chris Claremont. I liked Ms. Marvel from the start, inconsistencies and all. In trying to be her own person, she had more character than any of the other heroines in current comics and more than many heroes. I'm extremely sorry to see her magazine cancelled. I didn't discover Will Eisner and The Spirit until Warren brought out the reprints. I enjoy the strip very much and continue to buy Kitchen's version. Cat Yronwode's overview of the Spirit's women was, as she said, light, but good. I thought Denis McFarling caught the Eisner touch quite well in the intro drawing. Trina, a-pun my word, your defini-

tions of "Good Girl Art" have merit, but last I knew Ron Goulart was still male. Hmmm, if Lela Dowling will *stop* drawing for \$250 a month, how much would she require for exclusive rights?

I read *TA* #1-7 at a sitting. I'm impressed. I am particularly impressed in the improvement in both art and story in just seven issues. You, your staff, and your contributors are very much to be complimented.

I think the best single story so far has been "The Immortal." It had a nice tight plot, with no extra explanations, or sudden jumps that assumed that the reader was following, that have been the fault of many of the previous prose, as opposed to mostly illustrated, stories. The Skull Goddess demonstrated these faults particularly. Some of the scenes were obviously drawn from the authors' personal experiences. That added a nice touch.

On *TA* #8, Excalibur has definite promise. The roots of the concepts are clear, but they are good roots and growth into a pattern different from any others that I, at least, have encountered, shows all ready. Let's see more of Greg as a writer. I see that Ixiona is marking time. What next, Nick? Alex Bialy's interpretation of Ixiona is strikingly different from Lela Dowling's, but I like it. It reminds me strongly of the work of Hannes Bok. I don't think that Aphrodite is an improvement on Skull Goddess.

I have noticed that *THS* and *TA* are often humorous; something that the comics seldom are, even when they try to be. I chuckled and laughed aloud through parts one and two of "Ixiona." Ixiona and Eunice are just nutty enough that I could almost believe in them. I confess to having a grin of my own after reading "Carroll's Cat." Lela Dowling is one beautiful artist and was perfect for both stories.

You guys keep slipping in my psychological

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back door. First you give me Black Orchid, then a very short article and interior cover on Tigra (more, please!) who completely turns me on. Then, as if that weren't enough, Nick Chinn does "Ixiona," when I've been fascinated by centaurs, pegasai, and most of the whole Greco-Roman mythology since third grade. No fair! What are you going to do to my poor mind next?

I am looking forward to receiving CHFC publications and projects with pleasurable anticipation.

Gerald Perkins
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Actually, that offer was for \$250 per week to get Lela to stop drawing, and she past it by saying she wouldn't know what to do if she couldn't be drawing. Further offers? -SRJ



Dear Steve and Nick.

I like both of your titles very much, but at the same time like to make the following comments.

The Heroines Showcase — this could be improved, by the re-instatement of the heroine hotline feature, telling us who is appearing in which current comic.

The Adventuress — I am glad to see the return of Shamrock and Pixie, but whilst the written serials have continuity, the illustrated ones do not. What has happened to Cricket and Rainbow (issue 6), and Noel Knight (issue 7); in all cases we were promised "further adventures next issue!" Let's also have more of the Suicide Squad.

Jeff Dacombe
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Fortunately I'm not the one who made the promises of "more next issue." But, unfortunately, the people who work on these strips quickly realize the immense amount of time required to do a strip, and have a hard time getting themselves fired up for the next installment. Bob Rodi, for example, took his bows in the lettercol of THS #15.

If you want to see a strip continue, you have to make your very strong support made known here and through personal letters to the person(s) involved.

And you can rest assured that I will do my part to get the strips published when they find there way to me. -SRJ

Dear Steven,

Just read THS #16, and these are my impressions:

The showcase of the issue, of course, was the Chris Claremont interview (which might have been subtitled, the "mismangling of Ms. Marvel") — cripes, what a horror story! Unfortunately all Chris' revampings (and he did turn a dismal character into an exciting super-heroine) were not in time to save Ms. M from cancellation, but at least David Micheline is keeping her alive in *The Avengers*, at least as a temporary Avenger.

I liked Trina Robbins' humorous article about the various shades of "good girl art." (Ron Goulart? Ouch!) And Cat's article on the Spirit's Women was quite interesting, even though it was basically a recap of what I already knew. Scott Gibson's examination of the year for super-heroines was interesting (if only because he said Red Sonja is just behind Wonder Woman in popularity — which is rather amusing, considering her recent cancellation). Your Golden Age Girls article was also good — having never heard of Starr Flagg at all.

Nice art this issue, although I missed Lela Dowling. That's all for now, Steven.

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Nashville, TN 37205

WOMEN ARTISTS (cont. from pg. 7)

her style is overwhelmingly '40s, her attempt to turn out a 1971 "mod" style Marvel love story is unfortunate. However, there are one or two panels where she seems to have shrugged off all attempts to be contemporary and let her instincts guide her brush — these



panels are magnificently reminiscent of the old Miss Fury of 1944.

Note: My thanks to Jerry Iger and Donald Goldsamt for the much-needed information they supplied.

MISTRESS OF KUNG FU (cont. from pg. 25)

power, Leiko is finally learning how to use it wisely. The result is that Greville is captured, and Leiko escapes intact.

The final union of Shang Chi's path of mildness and Leiko's one of power comes in issue #77 as Shang tries to find some kind of peace amidst the fragments of old China which still survive behind bead curtains in Malay Jack's bar. Betrayed by the past and forced against his will to fight, he returns to Leiko and cries for the broken pieces of his life. And finally Leiko sees that tears are not weakness, that love is more than admiration of another's mask of strength. Leiko cries too, for all the beauty which is shattered, even as the memory of it is shattered by the ringing telephone and more trouble is announced. This time it is Leiko who is at a loss for what to do — and Shang who declares that they must do what has to be done. A balance is sought but never found, the yin of peaceful love is counterpoised against the yang of heroic action. So Leiko takes command again, arming herself, driving the car, rushing headlong into danger. But this time there is a difference — Leiko plays the game with a new-found reluctance which matches Shang Chi's erstwhile distaste for "dirty games." The result is another one of those inversions Moench likes to write so much. Leiko's car crashes and she is injured when the villain, Zaran, shoots out her tires, while Shang Chi, enraged beyond belief at the threat to his lover's life, smashes his way through Zaran's door and attacks him in a murderous rage.

The story isn't over yet — comic books are like that, you know — but regardless of what comes next, I doubt that Moench will opt for the easy stability of a Shang Chi-Leiko Wu team-up ala Green Arrow and Black Canary. He's too good a writer to let his novel degenerate into a series of episodes. *MoKF* has its flaws, chief among them being a tendency to run fill-in issues right in the middle of major plotlines, but all in all, it is still the most insightful and compassionate adventure strip currently being produced, and, speaking solely on the basis of personal opinion, its major heroine, Leiko Wu, is by far the most realistically portrayed woman in comics today.

GOLDEN AGE GIRLS (cont. from pg. 27)

indefinitely. The sunbeam was sometimes colored red and sometimes yellow, and moved back and forth between Sun Girl's left and right wrist.

Occasionally Sun Girl would also carry a red Emergency Pouch which in one episode was shown to contain at least a lariat and a portable electric tracer, super-sensitized to pick up nearby strange electrical rays.

Sun Girl apparently never had an origin, introduction or civilian identity. She first hit the stands in her own magazine followed a month later by an unheralded replacement of Toro as the Human Torch's sidekick in *Human Torch* and *Marvel Mystery*, and then solo appearances in *Marvel Mystery*.

Marvel Tales #97 marked the last appearance of Sun Girl in "A Sun Girl Special Feature 'Danger in the Sky'" which ran two pages. What makes this story unusual is that it appeared more than a year after *Marvel Mystery* was changed in title and content to *Marvel Tales*, and this story was buried amidst the usual monster/horror stories which composed this title.

With the big push on prices of Timely's and Good Girl Art, it's unlikely that the average heroine fan will be able to add any of Sun Girl's appearances to their collections (with the exception of the one reprint). *Marvel Mystery* #91 however is an exceptional value as it has a different heroine in each story; Sun Girl (w/ Human Torch), Namora (w/ Sub-Mariner), Venus, Golden Girl (w/ Captain America), and the Blonde Phantom. And the girl on the cover of this issue is Sun Girl despite the mis-colored hair and civilian clothes.

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